

SKETCHES · OF EASTERN · CHURCH · LIFE



By EUPHROSYNE
KEPHALA

WITH A FOREWORD BY THE BISHOP OF LONDON.

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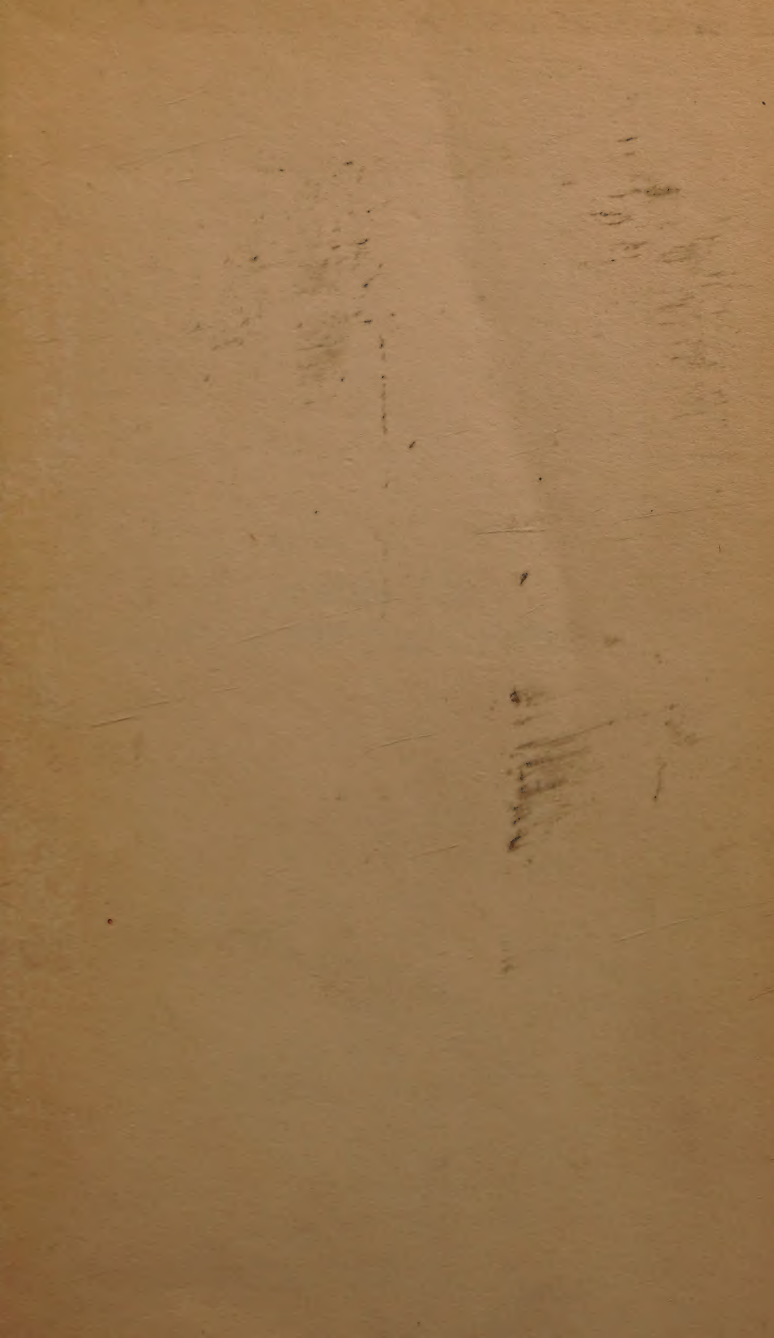
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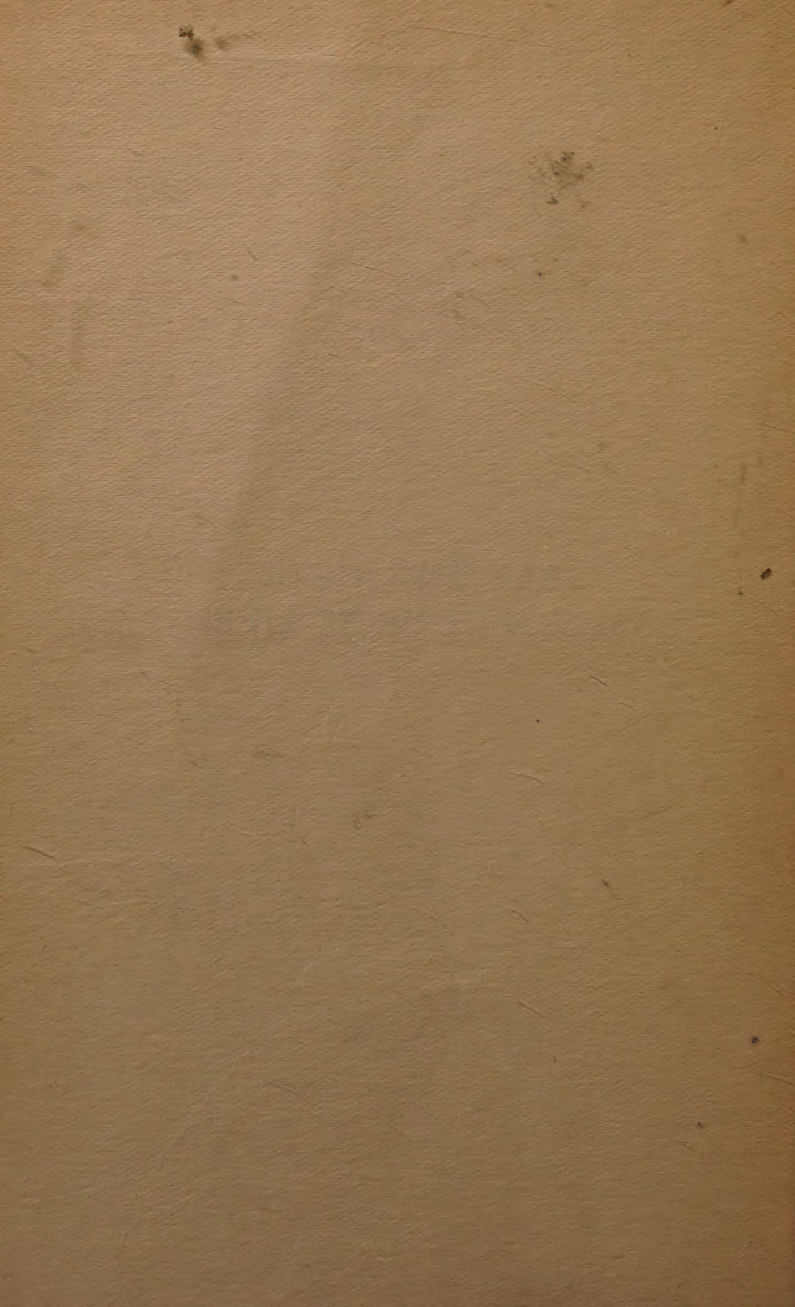
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DEAN 1879-1902





SKETCHES OF
EASTERN CHURCH LIFE



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By
EUPHROSYNE KEPHALA

With a Foreword

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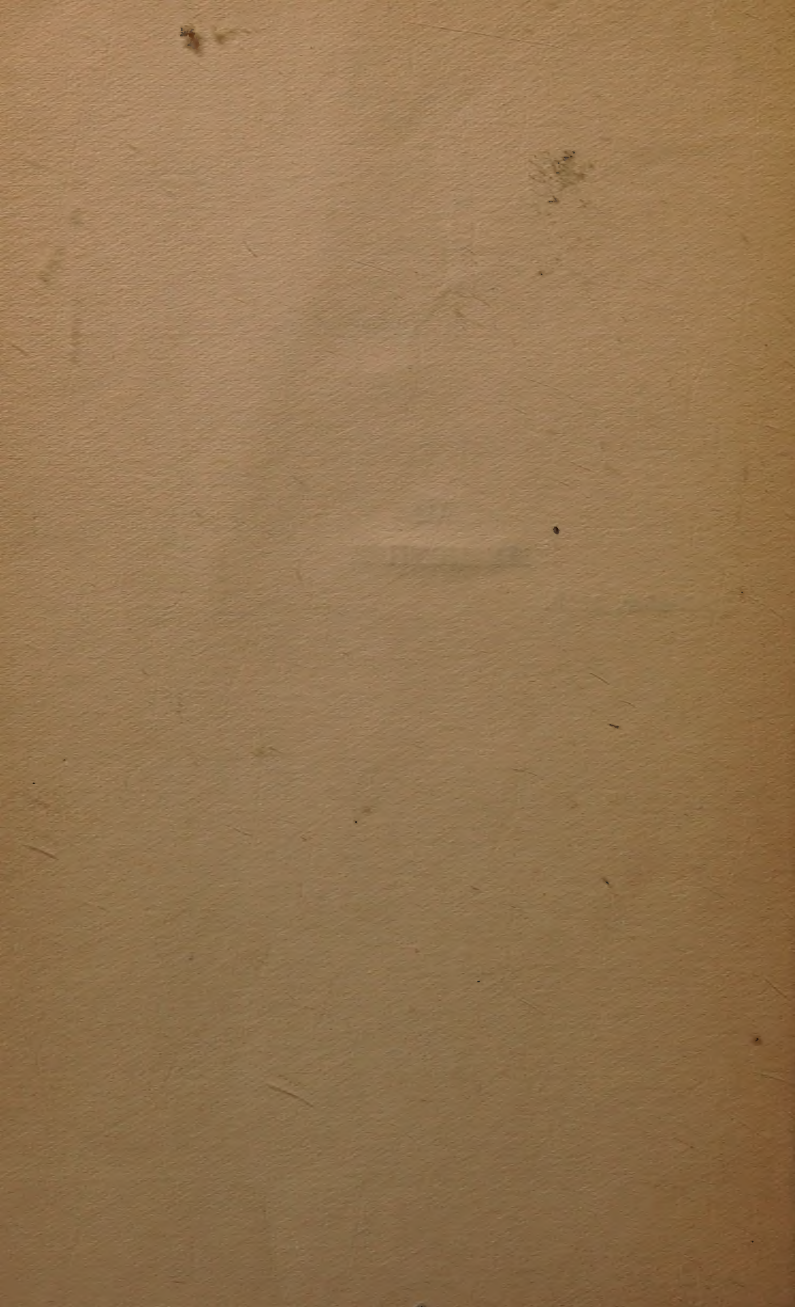
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TO
MY MOTHER

September, 1919.



FOREWORD

I AM moved to write a few words as a "Foreword" to these charming little sketches of Greek Church life, partly as some return for the kindness shown me in Greece—amongst others by the mother of the writer—but also by my desire that our Church and the Greek Church should know more of one another. When you go to Russia or to Greece, you find that it is their pathetic ignorance of our teaching and customs and our ignorance of theirs which seems to form the greatest obstacle to our union with the great Orthodox Church. Now these little sketches paint with great vividness Church life amongst the peasants of Greece. No doubt some will say that there is a great deal of superstition mixed up with it, and few would deny that there is some, but on the other hand it is delightful to see how all this simple peasant life in Greece centres round the Church, and seeks to get every part of itself blessed and sanctified by the beloved old Church which has kept the national spirit alive through the long centuries of Turkish misrule. I was received by the Bishops of

Greece in Athens last November, and on the very day of my return, the Archbishop of Athens was being received in St. Paul's Cathedral. Both at Athens by the Bishops and through the Archbishop's lips here, an earnest hope was expressed that we might know each other better. This little book is a step in that direction, and as one of the Presidents of the Society for promoting friendly relations between our two Churches, I give it a hearty welcome.

A. F. LONDON.

St. Luke's Day, 1919.

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INTRODUCTION

THESE simple little Sketches of the religious customs and Sacraments of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which I have endeavoured to describe in connection with the life of the Greek people, are not in any way a deep study of the Eastern Church—I am leaving this for others more learned than myself—but only what I have already called them, “Sketches of Eastern Church Life.”

Neither are they intended to initiate the Anglican Community into the doctrine of that Church.

My object in memorizing these “Impressions” (as I would call them), and in having them published, has been that readers belonging to the Anglican Church may get to know a little about the people of Greece and their National Church, how much that Church has done for them throughout the long years of Turkish oppression, to what degree it sustained and kept alive their faith in Providence, and how it comforted them and brought them finally to the haven of rest which is at last in sight for those sorely-tried Christians of the East.

From the little hill-side town of Zagora in Thessaly, where I have spent so many happy moments, I have drawn the greater number of my "Sketches"—perhaps because of the passionate attachment shown by the inhabitants of this mountain region to the customs of their forefathers in matters religious, as well as because of the particular interest I feel in the people themselves.

In conclusion, I crave leniency for my little work as being from the pen of one whose sole merit is her devotion to the subject.

EUPHROSYNE KEPHALA.

LONDON, 1919.

SKETCHES OF EASTERN CHURCH LIFE

A GREEK CHRISTENING

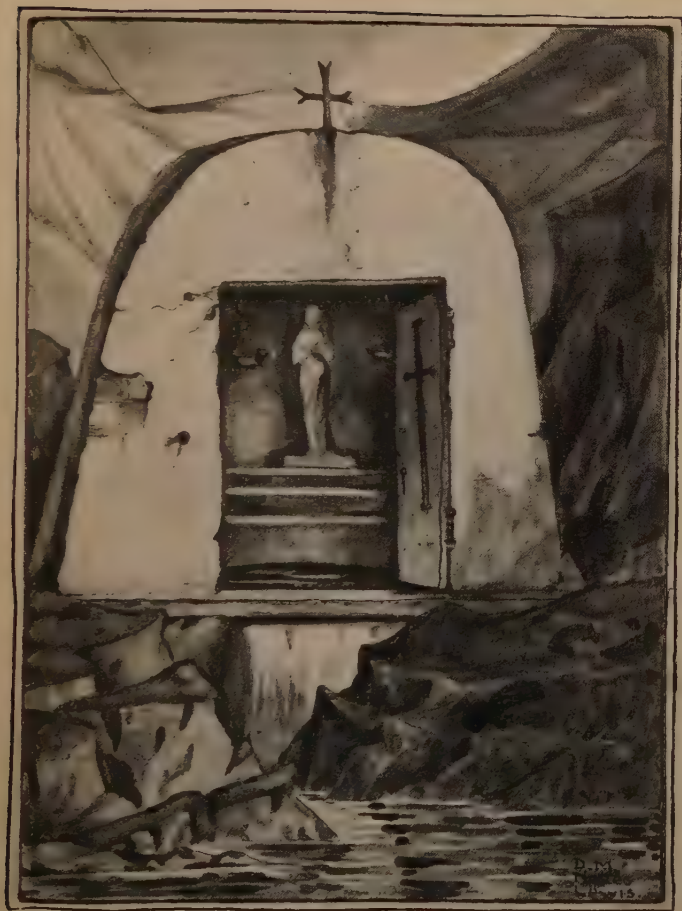
BAPTISM is considered by the Eastern Orthodox Church to be one of its Sacraments. The child on being baptized is immediately after anointed with the Holy Chrism, there being no separation in time between the two ceremonies of baptism and confirmation as in the Western Church. The custom of infant Communion has also been preserved unaltered in the East. The child can receive the Holy Communion on any day following upon its christening.

There is generally one sponsor, upon whom falls a very prominent part in the ceremony, as he is the one who takes the vows for the child, gives the name and is answerable for its future spiritual and material welfare. He will also bear all the expense of the christening, and will give the "Neophotistus," as the child is styled, a cross, and a sacred eikon of its patron saint, besides the christening robes and name.

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Among the peasants in Greece, a sponsor is considered as some one occupying a high and respected position in the family. And great was their joy when I undertook the duties of sponsor to one of the children in a peasant's family I had long known. In their kindly hospitable manner which is so typical of that class, I found much that was delightful and interesting in their customs attending this ceremony. I was to be considered henceforth as one of their circle, on becoming a "Koumbara" (sponsor) to their little son, and that carried with it many privileges. The ceremony took place in the tiny living-room of the house. I can see the low, dark-timbered roof and tiny mullioned windows of that cottage in a Mount Pelion village—the gorgeous stole of the priest over his flowing black robe, like a fantastic splash of colour amidst the bareness of that simple room, with the eager faces of the women and children pressing around us, where we stood, with the font between us and the solemn little boys holding large wax candles on either side of it.

In the back room the mother stayed alone, holding in her arms the child wrapped in a white woollen cloth, quite unclothed, preparatory to its immersion in the baptismal font. Silently she hands it to a woman standing by, who in turn brings it in and places it in my arms, saying, "May it be lucky," and takes her stand among the others. The priest commences his intoning, assisted by his reader



"Waters issued out from under the threshold."

—*Ezekiel 47. 1.*

A SHRINE OF OUR LADY OVER A SPRING NEAR YENIKOI, IN THE
CHALKIDIKE RANGE, ABOUT SIX MILES FROM SALONIKA, ON THE
MONASTIR ROAD.

From a drawing by Lieut. D. M. Noyes Lewis, South Wales Borderers.



who holds the oil for the anointing, and the prayer book. The mysterious rites of baptism have commenced by an incantation by which he proceeds to purge the water in the font, of all evil spirits, by murmuring a prayer under his breath and blowing softly in each corner of it, saying aloud, "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost," making at the same time the sign of the Cross over it. Then, turning to me, he puts this question three times, which I likewise three times answer:

"Dost thou reject Satan?"

"I reject him."

"Dost thou receive Christ?"

"I receive Him."

"And dost thou believe in Him?"

"I believe in Him," I answer, repeating the words of the Creed alone.

The priest then takes the child from me, and holding it aloft, says in a loud voice while immersing it three times in the water: "We baptize the servant of God, John, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

I receive the child back again in my arms, while a little boy runs into the back room to tell the name to the expectant mother, who is never actually present at the ceremony.

The priest then proceeds to anoint the child on his forehead, breast, hands and feet, in the name of the Holy Trinity, in order that he may receive the gifts of the Holy Ghost, peace, love and happi-

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ness, saying each time, "The seal of the gift of the Holy Ghost. Amen." He also snips a few hairs from the head, and throws them in the font, the child being henceforth dedicated to God.¹ We move three times round the font, in a circle, I holding the child, the two boys the candles, and the priest chanting the words, "All those baptized in Christ, have put on Christ! Alleluia," three times, after which the child is borne back to its mother to be dressed. After it is clothed and a cross put round its neck, the infant is brought back to me, and the service continues, prayers for the newly received member of Christ's Church being offered up.

After reading the Epistle and Gospel, the priest addresses the baby before the end, in the following terms :

"Thou hast been baptized, and received the True Light ; hast been anointed, hast been consecrated and bathed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

The priest and myself occupy the places of honour on the broad sofa, the remaining guests sitting in a circle near us. A large tray with jam and coffee is brought in and handed round while the health of the infant is proposed by the guests, who wish me *Nà σοῦ ζήσῃ* (May it, the child, be of long life to you !). Finally, having none of the *Μαρτυράτικα*.²

¹ In Corfu the hairs are stuck *ὅν* the back *ὀφ* the eikon with candle wax.

² Martyriatica, a tiny oval-shaped medal bearing on

to give away, as is customary, I scatter freely to the children there, two-penny pieces as a remembrance of the ceremony.

The whole ceremony is symbolical of the redemption through baptism in the font, of the child from the curse of original sin which is his inheritance, the sponsor acting for him when he first proclaims his rejection of Satan and his works, then his "putting on of Christ" in answer to the priest's questions. The total immersion is the purification of the child from bodily sin through the efficacy of the "blessed water" in the font, by which it is removed, while the anointing is the seal of Christ upon the child, in token of its sanctity as a member and communicant of Christ's Church.

Sponsors in Greece are the spiritual parents of the child, and are responsible for his upbringing and welfare in after life. Where pecuniary aid is needed, for his or her education, it must be forthcoming on the part of the sponsor who undertakes this and many obligations of a similar kind. And when the time comes for the child, in his turn, to marry, the sponsor must perform the duties of "crowning" him at the marriage ceremony.

Further, it creates a bond of relationship which prohibits intermarriage between the "spiritual" children of sponsors. Thus a boy and a girl having one side the baptism of our Lord in the Jordan with the Dove descending upon him, and on the other side a cross and the child's name and the date.

the same godparent could not legally come together in wedlock, as being "spiritual children" of the same parent, and therefore related according to the Church.

The Church has, in its patriarchal sense, done much to preserve the family life in Greece, which is due to the spiritual sway it exercises over its children, and has done much doubtless for the preservation of the national life of the Greek people. Under its shelter and protection nearly all the early Christian customs and traditions have been kept alive; for the Orthodox Church is nothing if not conservative, and there have been but few innovations introduced into its life since the beginning of the Christian era; to the Church, therefore, the Greeks have clung in times alike of happiness and misfortune with a tenacity and devotion scarcely equalled by any other nation.

THE BABY'S FIRST COMMUNION.

On the first Sunday after the christening, I took the child to the parish church to take its first Communion. He wore his robe and bonnet, and cross round his neck, and the woman who carried him bore also the candle used at the Christening service.

After the Liturgy, and at a given moment, the priest appears at the central door holding the Host, while the deacon says, "With the fear of God,

faith and love, make your approach," to which the priest answers, "Save, O Lord, Thy people, and bless thine inheritance."

The priest then gives the baby the Holy Communion, saying, "The servant of God, John, receives the Sacrament, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen." And the first event in the religious life of the baby since he has become a member of the great Church of the East has been accomplished.

A GREEK PEASANT MARRIAGE

MARRIAGES in Greece are attended by many quaint ceremonies and customs, the Church, as is natural, taking a prominent part in most of them. The ceremony of marriage itself, which is one of the Church's sacraments, or "Mysteria," is divided into two parts—the "Betrothal" and the "Crowning," or actual marriage ceremony. The betrothal consists in the exchange of the rings which both man and woman wear,¹ as soon as the formal plight is given by both parties. This ceremony is performed by the priest in the presence of the relations, at the bridegroom's house.

Henceforth, and until the wedding ceremony is performed, both wear their rings,¹ although they are not considered married yet; as the betrothal is not binding in the Greek Church.

There are certain ceremonies which precede the wedding, which generally take place with the pea-

¹ The bridegroom gives his fiancée the ring which has his name inside, and wears himself the one which bears that of his future wife. At the wedding ceremony, his own reverts to himself again.

sants on Sunday, such as the "sprinkling with flour" of the young couple on the Wednesday evening before. This is, I believe, one peculiar to Thessaly, where I witnessed many a wedding.

The flour used is that from which the bread for the wedding festivities will be baked; and a lot of it is put into a wooden tub, after various coins of value have previously been scattered in its midst.

The bride is then handed a wooden sieve with which she sifts the flour; and it is considered an omen of good luck if she finds any of the coins in that first lot of flour. Meanwhile the assembled guests sprinkle the young couple with flour, wishing them at the same time many years of happiness and a long life, the colour of the flour being symbolical of the white hairs of mature age which it is hoped the young couple will attain. The rest of the evening is devoted to dancing.

The wedding takes place on a Sunday. And perhaps there can be no more picturesque setting to these wedding ceremonies than the little hill-side town of Zagora, in Thessaly, perched eyrie-like on the wooded slopes of Mount Pelion, where I often witnessed one.

Down the cobble-stoned paths of the village, steep at times and winding, comes the bridal procession, the musicians playing a lively tune that is echoed by the hills round.

Along the sunlit paths of the green woods, the

bright coloured costumes of the peasant women and girls make radiant splashes of colour as they descend to the old Church of the Saviour, which is awaiting them.

For the bridegroom has called for the bride at her house, where the priest has blessed the rings in the presence of the sponsor and relations, and all go in a procession to the church.

The bridal party moves up the centre and stands before a small table outside the rood-screen, on which two lighted candles, the Gospel, and the crowns of orange blossoms are placed.

The bride wears a full pleated skirt, short velvet jacket and a bright coloured sash. Her hair she wears in plaits tied with ribbon to match her sash, and set on her head a coloured handkerchief, edged with a lace border.

The bridegroom wears wide blue trousers, and a white shirt under a jacket of blue serge *à la Zouave*. He wears white socks and black shoes, and a jaunty little red or black cap set on the side of his head.

Both have previously partaken of the Holy Communion on the day before.

The sponsor (Koumbaros) stands immediately behind the couple, while two boys, holding large wax candles ornamented with white ribbon and orange blossom, place themselves at either side of the table.

The priests wear their most gorgeous vestments of

richly embroidered material. One of them wears a robe of royal blue flecked with silver; another of dull magenta and gold.

And as they stand against the dark background of carved wood and gilt of the "Iconostasis" (rood-screen) I feel that I am looking upon some beautiful old Byzantine mosaic, so vivid and yet so harmoniously blended are the rich colours and outlines of the figures beneath the dome and arches of the old church.

The scene is so wonderfully artistic in its effect and so absolutely belonging to a bygone age, as to be the materialization of a quaint old tradition which is crystallized in the gorgeous outward symbols of the Church of the East.

First comes the ceremony of the Espousals, which like in all ceremonies of the Greek Church is done thrice, symbolical of the Holy Trinity. The priest blesses the rings and gives the one to the bridegroom and the other to the bride. The sponsor exchanges them three times, while the priest says, "The servant of God, Nicholas, is betrothed to the handmaid of God, Mary, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen." After which he again repeats the formula in the case of the bride.

"Blessed are they that fear the Lord," chants the priest—which are the opening words of the office of the coronation—as he censes them both.

Lengthy prayers are offered up. The chanting and heavy scent of incense fills the church, mingled

also with the perfume of the flowers, adding to the rich symbolism of the ceremony, as the priest taking the crowns of orange blossom joined by white satin ribbon, crowns first the bridegroom, saying, "The servant of God, Nicholas, is crowned for the handmaid of God, Mary, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

This he repeats thrice, making the sign of the cross while the sponsor exchanges the crowns behind. Then he crowns also the bride, with the same words. Then he blesses them, saying thrice:

"O Lord our God, with glory and honour crown them."

The crowns are then left on their heads.

The Epistle is read and then the Gospel, "At that time there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee . . ." followed by more prayers, until the priest, taking the common cup of wine, offers it to the newly wedded pair, chanting, "I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord" (Ps. cx. 12, LXX). He also partakes of it, as likewise does the sponsor. Immediately after the priest, and the bride and bridegroom turn in a circle round the table, which ceremony is symbolical of the unending life, whilst the sponsor holds the crowns behind.

The priest chants, "Rejoice, O Esaias, the Virgin conceived and brought forth a son, Emmanuel, God and Man, East is his name, Him we magnify and the Virgin we call blessed."

Afterwards he removes the crowns, and taking off that of the bridegroom, he says to him :

“ Be magnified, O Bridegroom, as Abraham ” ;
and to the bride on taking off hers :

“ And thou, O Bride, be magnified as Sarah.’

Then the relatives and friends come and congratulate them, and when the newly-married pair have embraced each other, the priest gives the final blessing :

“ May Christ, our true God, who by His presence at Cana made marriage an honourable estate, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and Saints . . . save us and be merciful to us, as a good and merciful Father. . . . Amen.”

The crowns will be hung together in a little glass case on the wall of the nuptial chamber, near the sacred eikon which has its own particular place in every Greek household, whether rich or poor.

This ceremony of marriage, with its elaborate ceremonial, is perhaps the richest, also in symbolism, as well as in ritual.

For what can the exchange of rings, the wearing of crowns, the sipping of red wine out of a common cup, and the encircling of the Holy Table be other than a symbolic representation of the Mystery which the Church proclaims the ceremony to be ?

The Eastern Church incorporated into its services many of the customs and traditions of the East. For instance, in the ceremony of the Espousals, the Church makes use of two rings.

The priest blesses them and gives the one to the bridegroom, and the other to the bride. This reminds us of the ancient custom when a ring was given and received by each of the espoused.

This also is the meaning of the action of the sponsor, when immediately he exchanges the rings, putting that of the bridegroom on the finger of the bride and vice versa, leaving them finally where they were put by the priest.

The use by the Eastern Church of crowns in the matrimonial ceremony is mentioned in the "Song of Solomon," where King Solomon is crowned by his mother on the day of his Espousals.¹

Finally, the Church adopted the crown as a symbol of regal dignity, to honour the purity of Christian marriage, which will be exchanged in heaven for an incorruptible crown of glory, if the married pair fulfil their duties.²

The Greek Church, true to her traditions, has handed down to us all of them; and, indeed preserved that Apostolic tradition which is hers alone, in this great branch of Eastern Christianity.

The gay and festive character of a wedding is celebrated by the dancing of the stately "Syrto" in the courtyard outside the Church to the music of violins and guitars. After a few rounds the bridal procession retraces its steps to the bride-

¹ Solomon, chap. iii. 11, LXX.

² Chrys. Homg. in 1 Tim.

groom's house, to continue feasting and dancing far into the night.

The bride, on crossing the threshold of the bridegroom's house after the marriage, steps on a piece of iron, symbolical of the strength invoked in her married life. It is put there by her mother-in-law together with a pomegranate. In this latter symbol, I seem to see again but one of the many classic traditions which creep out in the life of the Greek people.

PATRON SAINTS AND EPIPHANY

THE anniversary of one's patron saint in Greece takes the place of the birthday—the date of which many are totally ignorant of—and is made the occasion of much rejoicing and festivity in the family circle.

As often as not the child receives the name of the saint upon whose day he or she is born ; or the child takes the name of its grandfather or grandmother, which custom keeps the same names in the family for generations.

In many Greek families there is a patron saint, like St. John is in our own, and one of the sons invariably bears the name of the saint of that name. There is a wonderful old eikon quite black with age, and with the face almost indiscernible now, worm-eaten in parts also, which I have always looked upon with reverence since my childhood. It stood upon the shelf, near the glass case, in which hung the two silver crowns of orange blossom which my parents had worn at their marriage. In that

same case was an old carved crucifix, and a tiny eikon of St. Spiridion, the patron saint of Corfu, my father's birthplace.

Every evening, at five, as the bell of the neighbouring church rings for the "Ἑσπερινὸς" (Vespers) the duty of lighting the "κανδύλα" before the Eikonostasion is religiously carried out. Reverence is done and a prayer murmured, the face, as with the orthodox, always turned to the east when in prayer. I once witnessed one of the most interesting incidents connected with morning prayer when I was travelling on a Greek steamer to one of the isles.

On the deck lay the silent figures of the third-class passengers, which the first glimmer of dawn showed around me on that summer day. Suddenly the crimson rays of the rising sun struck the ship, and I saw an old woman arise and turning towards it, make reverence and crossing herself again and again said her morning prayer. In this piece of ritual I felt that the poetry in the Greek people would and never could die out.

As a child one is impressed by the sanctity of *that* corner of the room, which is reserved for the "sacred objects" in the house, and I think this feeling never quite wears off: it being the first direct impression of the part the Church plays in the life of the Greek people, as something vital and stimulating in their lives, such is the vivid character it bears in relation to the facts of life. For life in

Greece, among the orthodox, is centred round the church and its festivities ; it is an expression of the people's existence itself, in its customs and sacraments (like baptism and marriage), in its fastings and prayers, vigils and feast days. Nay, its very merrymaking is bound up in the dancing at Eastertide and the "Panygyris" held to celebrate every saint's day—so that it has indeed become a national as well as a spiritual fortress to the orthodox Greeks.

To that corner of the house where the "sacred eikons," the glass case with the crowns and the crucifix, are placed comes the priest wearing his "ἐπιτραχήλιον" (stole) and holding the cross in his hand, to bless the house and its inmates, with the "holy water," which the sacristan holds for him.

"He that was baptised in Jordan," he chants, quoting words from the hymn of the Epiphany, and whilst so doing he approaches and makes an inclination in front of the εἰκονοστάσιον (eikonostasion) and sprinkles the ἁγιασμὸν (holy water) with the bunch of sweet basil and offers the cross for us to kiss. He goes through all the rooms chanting, and sprinkling "holy water."

This is on the eve of Epiphany ; fasting is observed, as on the following day, when there will be the formal blessing of waters, and the immersion of the cross.

It is a cloudless day, January 6, at Phalerum, one of those sparkling winter days of sunshine and

blue sky in Athens, and at about eleven o'clock in the morning the procession leaves church for the pier on the seashore. It looks like a beautiful pageant, as it moves across the sunlit esplanade on to the pier; the silken banners of the saints, held by the choir boys robed in white and blue, the sun-rays striking the golden crucifix held on high, like a jewel in their midst. Then the group of priests in their rainbow-hued vestments surrounding a gorgeously robed bishop in a flashing mitre and staff. A large concourse of people follow. The sea, azure in its depth, resembles some deep mountain pool, so serene it is, and mingled with the soft lapping sound of the tiny waves is the Byzantine chanting coming from the procession, until it halts on the pier.

The Bishop detaches himself from the other priests, and at a given moment flings the cross—to which is attached a long blue silk ribbon of which he holds the end—into the sea. From the pier I see a diver fling himself into the water, and immediately after the cross, gleaming with the sun-drops on it, is returned triumphantly to the bishop. The ceremony is concluded, and after lengthy prayer and hymns for the day, “Blessed is He Who cometh in the name of the Lord” and “This is my beloved Son,” which refer to the descent of the Holy Spirit upon our Lord at His baptism in the Jordan, the procession re-forms, and returns to the church. From the font, in the middle of the church, the

faithful, carry away the *ἁγιασμὸς* (holy water) in small bottles, brought for the occasion.

The public reservoirs are then opened, and the water issuing from them is allowed to circulate in the town. The waters are "blessed" now, and are free from all evil spirits.

A PILGRIMAGE

FAITH in prayer and offerings, which is so deeply rooted in the heart of the Greek orthodox, has become embodied in the many shrines scattered all over Greece, whether on steep mountain side or on some sea-washed isle of the Ægean. To some it is indeed the "Summum Bonum" of their lives to have accomplished a pilgrimage to one of these holy places, and the culminating act in a life of reverence and devotion to the Church of their fathers, with its wonderful traditions which are also indissolubly bound up with their national inheritance.

In Zagora, that stronghold of religious conservatism, our worthy ancestors, who were landowners and magistrates, chose the Holy Land for their pilgrimages, bringing back with them many beautiful eikons and Church books for their parish church of St. Paraskevé; and from a great-grandfather I have the small gold cross with the tiny splinter of the Holy Cross itself, which is a precious relic indeed, and believed to have preserved me from

death in a terrible accident, as I was wearing it at the time.

Seated one day on the broad-cushioned seats under the tiny mullioned windows in that beautifully panelled old room of dark walnut, I listened to the tales of the pilgrimages made by these people who had "faith" in their hearts.

I loved to hear them talk of the vows they had made; their offerings of candles of all sizes—according to the height of the child or man who was to be saved—which they offered to the Virgin or saint who would listen to their prayers. The whispered confidences of the women whom nature had cursed with barrenness, but who were cured, after going on foot to bathe in the spring of water near the Church of the Koimesis and praying the Blessed Mother to grant them a child.

Of the hardships they went through, like the seven hours' walk bare-footed to the village of St. Laurence the younger, with the miracle-working shrine of the saint who was a martyr for his religion at the hands of the Turks, some few centuries ago.

Down in the great gorge lies that quaint grey-stoned village, to the right of the path that skirts the mountain side of Pelion.

It is the feast of St. Laurence on the 17th August, and the deep sound of the church bell comes in broken cadences as we wind in single file on our mules along the steep path which bears down into the village. Some of the pilgrims are on foot and

are carrying their offerings of wax candles, or presents of silver and bronze to the church.

We have been journeying since dawn this morning, leaving Zagora before the sun's rays can penetrate the thick chestnut forests through which our road lies part of the way.

The exhilaration one feels in the pure mountain air, at such an altitude of some 3,000 feet, is too elusive to describe. The people themselves feel it as they go joyfully along, with their faces set to the "land of hope" which lies before them. In this company of simple souls one becomes conscious of the happiness in their lives because of the simple faith which animates them. They are truly the salt of the earth, these good peasants of Zagora whose pilgrimage to St. Laurence is such an event in their lives.

In the courtyard of the church are assembled the pilgrims from the neighbouring villages, those whom the church cannot hold inside. Some have lain there the whole night long, and have held a "vigil," they tell us, before the blessed saint's shrine.

Mass is proceeding in the church, and across the large icon in the iconostasis I see the string of silver offerings of every description, brought by those the saint favours. And touching is it beyond words to see those limbs and eyes and tiny human figures in beaten silver made as thankofferings for health restored or a desire of the heart granted

because they have "vowed them" to the saint.

"To Him came the halt and the lame and the blind," reads the priest from the Gospel, "and He cured them." Likewise come these people, who hope that through the offering of the divine sacrifice of the Mass on their behalf, and also through their prayers and exhortations, He will reward their faith as He did those peasants of Galilee.

The "Leitourgia" is finished and the priest comes out into the courtyard and sprinkles the people with holy water, and holds the cross which they press forward to kiss reverently, while he pronounces the blessing aloud, "in the name of the Holy Trinity." A boy holding a tray with "Antidoron" ¹ follows him. The pilgrims can now break their fast by eating a bit of it. Nearly all of them have been fasting rigorously, and not even water has passed their lips since the break of day. "In fasting and prayer," in the words of the Church, do these followers of the Orthodox Church perform their religious duties. Self-denial is one of their virtues, when one thinks of the frugal meals made of black olives or plain boiled vegetables in a little oil, with garlic and fruit to complete them. And on certain days the Church prescribes even stricter fasts, when it calls for the "putting aside of oil and wine" in its injunctions.

So, under the great plane trees near by, quite

¹ "Antidoron," the rest of the loaf used for the Communion service.

near the great mountain cataract which tumbles down the mountain side, is the humble repast laid of salted fish and vegetables and olives and fruit.

The spirits of all run high : it could not be otherwise on such a day. The beauty of the deep-blue sea through the trembling green of the trees, the sparkling foam of the waterfall under a blue sky that can only be seen in Greece, are there before us.

And when the afternoon shadows begin to cast their purple and brown lights on the cobble-stoned paths of the villages, we mount and ride off slowly, back to Zagora, with all the earth throwing out its sweetest scents, as if drawn forth by the hot rays of the sun as a greeting to us along the mountain paths we climb.

Voices are hushed, and the tinkle of the mule's bell rings a gentle refrain amidst the brooding stillness of the hills.

As we climb higher and higher the white houses of St. Laurence look like a flock of sheep nestling in the verdure far away in the hollow between two steep cliffs—it all seems very remote to me in the stillness of dusk, till the voices of the peasants bidding me good night, on our arrival at Zagora, breaks the spell of my reverie.

Perhaps the greatest of these miracle-working shrines is the one dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, at the island of Tenos. A wonderful old eikon was found in a well, a century ago and was conveyed to the cathedral, a magnificent building richly

endowed and full of votive offerings brought by the visitors to the shrine.

Every form of sickness, either of body or soul, are supposed to be cured after a pilgrimage to this holy spot.

In such a manner do the faithful in heart hope to obtain, through the *Χάρις* (grace) of God, a reply to their request. For there is no hope too great for the maker of a pilgrimage at the shrine of the saint.

To *Ἅγιος Φανούριος*¹ they go if they have lost anything, and by dedicating a votive offering to the saint, they hope to have revealed to them, through the grace of the saint, the place where the object is hidden. Or an unhappy wife will take her nuptial crowns and hang them before the eikon of the Saviour, in order to obtain His grace for a renewal of her marital happiness.

To St. Nicholas come the mariners, and in Corfu every family almost have a son called after the saint, because it is an island and the inhabitants are seafaring people. On every little Greek steamer there is an eikon of St. Nicholas, before which burns a *κανδύλα* against the perils of the sea.

At Corfu there is the shrine of St. Spiridion which contains the body itself. It was brought to the island by the noble family of Voulgaris after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, and has a sump-

¹ A literal translation of his name being "The Revealing Saint."

tuous church built by the family to house the holy remains.

Ever since the eldest son of Count Voulgaris has been dedicated to the service of the Church, and is the principal parish priest of the Church of St. Spiridion at Corfu.

To this Christain shrine the Mussulman pilgrims of Epirus come and worship ; they do reverence and leave their offerings of lighted candles at his shrine like the most devout of orthodox. And shall I tell you how it comes about that they should do so ? Well, they are the descendants of those Christians who, under the dire persecution of the Turks, denied their faith, but in whose blood runs the tradition of veneration of the Christian martyrs. It is a strange thing indeed this pilgrimage of the bitter enemies of Christendom to the place of worship of their ancestors.

To St. Spiridion also are dedicated children by their parents, for one year, after a severe illness from which, through the grace of the saint and his mediation the child has recovered. Thus it came about that my father was “dedicated” to the saint when five years old, and he wore a black robe after the pattern of the priest’s garments ; on his fair curling locks he wore a round black cap.

A VIGIL

AMONG the people of that mountainous district, on Mount Pelion, it is quite customary to keep these vigils, or "agripniai" as they are called by them. It was there that I so often followed the little groups of peasant women whom I knew, when they went with the priest of their parish, to hold a vigil on some special occasion or other. And the poorest among them could afford enough olive oil for the church lamps and a few pence for the offering of loaves and candles.

The "agrypnia" is kept in the afternoon of any day.

And what are these "vigils" kept for? you will ask. In the Greek Church they take the form of a prayer for the welfare of some one, either a traveller setting out on his journey, or as a thanksgiving service for any favour obtained; in any case, it is an offering made by the devout who seek the Almighty's help, or who in receiving it return their humble thanks through the Church's mediation.

No peasant of Zagora, however poor, will neglect to hold a "vigil" at any of the tiny churches that are scattered all over the hillside. They are known as "exoclissia," these chapels, because they lie outside the little hill town itself; and are often buried among the grey olives, or thick chestnut woods of Mount Pelion. You come upon them suddenly, as we did that bright afternoon in a clearing among the trees, their little cupola of brown or grey dark against a strip of deep blue sea beyond, the faded colours of the fresco of the saint over the doorway, so old-looking and sad and so appealing in its setting of radiant splendour around. Away out of the sunshine and quivering sea line, and moist depths of the forest green, the dim interior of the little church seemed even darker, and the dark brown of the iconostasis and stalls more dusky and shadowy than before. Gradually one's eyes felt accustomed to it and one noticed that the carving on the rood-screen is really gay with birds picking at bunches of grapes hanging in clusters of dull gold, and that the vine with its tendrils are entwining the cross.

The icons are dull harmonies in reds, blues and greens. A great icon of St. Athanasius, whose church it is, is black with age, except for the gold of the halo round the head and the long-fingered hands.

The priest is putting on his stole, and begins his prayers for Vespers in the sanctuary. The

tiny oil lamps hanging dull and empty before the iconostasis are filled with oil by one of the women, and send out a trembling but warm glow of colour; the candles look like feeble ghosts of light beside the gorgeous patches of sunlight that come in at the open doors.

"Great art Thou, O Lord, and wonderful are Thy works," he intones from within, as he lays the *προσφορά* (loaf of oblation); bearing the sacred impression¹ on the altar, before he recites the other prayers, in which the names of those who are keeping their vigil are mentioned.

From time to time he issues forth and sends clouds of incense aloft before the two icons of Christ and His Holy Mother, and upon us who are gathered there. "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes," he murmurs again and again, before he recites the Holy Virgin's prayer, "Hail, Mary," and the words of the chant, used on this occasion, "The rich have become poor and have hungered, but those who seek the Lord shall never want for every good thing," which he repeats again and again.

He then cuts up the loaves, saying all the while "As Christ blessed the five loaves and fed the multitude, so likewise do Thou bless this bread."

¹ The bread bears a circular impression within which is a Greek cross, divided in four squares, and inscribed, "Jesus Christ conquers."

In remembrance thereof he then distributes it to all of us there.

The whole ceremony is charming in its simple symbolism, with an element of something intensely human underlying it, embodying as it does a beautiful tradition in the distributing of the loaf by the priest to all who have joined in the service. Standing there, he looks like a picture of the Good Shepherd himself, "feeding his sheep." At least he is the father of his flock; we kiss his hand as he presses a piece of the antidoron into our hand. He has performed a spiritual duty, of which we are partakers also. He is the celebrant in an act of devotion in which we all participate spiritually. And every heart present is comforted and strengthened by the prayers offered up for all, and the craving of the spirit, after communion with the divine, is at length satisfied.

Outside on a wooden bench the priest rests awhile, before the stiff climb through the woods back to Zagora. A woman is giving him some cold water to drink from a well near; he holds in his hand some green figs while another woman produces others from a basket and offers them to us in turn. The peasants sit grouped together a little away from the priest, who has become one of the people again, and talks to them of their families and domestic affairs. They are all known to him and he addresses them by their Christian name when he speaks to any one of them or to the

children. He sits in their midst looking like some wonderful old biblical picture come to life, in his flowing garment, and fair locks hanging loosely over his neck. The homely character of the scene was indeed impressively characteristic of the place the Church fills in the lives of the peasants of Greece, for does it not in this example, as in many others, fulfil that early Apostolic teaching, which is so alive and so vivid in the life of the Greek Church of to-day?

ALL SOULS' DAY

THE Greek Church continually offers prayers for the dead, through the mediation of the priests, on certain days appointed by its Church, which take the form of "Masses for the repose of the soul."¹ These can be offered up at any time, but more especially on the last two Saturdays of Lent, called Psycho-Savation, (τῶν ψυχῶν) or Saturday of the Souls.

On the first Saturday in Lent is St. Theodore's Day, which is All Souls' Day, when all the people of Athens make their pilgrimage to the lovely cemetery lying under the shadow of Mount Hymettus, and facing that beautiful expanse of green fields that seem to ripple away in billows down to the edge of the blue sea at Phalerum.

A truly beautiful spot to rest in from life's fitful dream and one hardly to be equalled anywhere, I think, for its surroundings.

On that glorious spring morning, it lay like a great garden in repose, all the sweet-smelling herbs and flowers making the air redolent with per-

¹ Liturgies for individuals can be held at any time.

fume. . . . All along the white dusty road winding up to it, the vendors of wreaths of laurel and violets and every other flower, keep watch for the stream of pedestrians who pass along its fragrant way in the warm sunshine of March.

Down one path there comes a procession of black-robed women, holding their floral offerings, types of the Tanagra figurines, as I like to call them, because they wear their long black shawls draped over their heads and shoulders just like their models in the Athens Museum.

At their head walks a priest, wearing his "epitrachelion" (stole), and holding a censer and prayer book. A small boy is holding a large plate, and on it the dish of "Kolyva" prepared by the women, as is customary on this occasion. It is composed of boiled grain—a quaint symbolism representing the Christian doctrine that man is "sown in corruption and raised in incorruption"—and pomegranate seeds and sugar—and is offered as an act of remembrance in memory of the dead.

The plate is laid on a grave, while the priest begins his recitation of the "*Τρισάγιον*" (Trisagion) a prayer for the repose of the soul of the departed. "Lord, give rest unto Thy servant," in green places, in pastures, from whence has fled all suffering, and all tears. "Thou, the Giver of all mercies, . . . enrol Thy servant Peter among Thy blessed saints." And so on through many

beautiful prayers which the Church has prescribed for the dead, and for the souls of those who seek our prayers. The men and women hold lighted candles, and after the prayer is concluded one of them distributes handfuls of the "Kolyva," which we all taste, saying, "God forgive him," and the party retraces its steps, between the paths of crosses and monuments of gleaming marble on either side.

At the cemetery church door I stop and peep in. The play of light and shade from the yellow candle light, from the candles held by the people, through the incense-laden mists of its dark interior, is more than anything I know, truly Rembrandtesque. "Lord, grant rest to Thy servants," are the words of the chant that is borne to me. The words are wafted on high by a chorus of men's deep voices, like sighs that are echoes of a sad heart, which carries with it all the burden of the soul's sorrow in its pleading accents. . . .

Nowhere does the mysticism of the Eastern Church make a more direct appeal to one than in this service for the dead. In no more poignant manner does one feel the strength of the spiritual call than in this cry across the grave, pleading for mercy, to the throne of the Unseen beyond . . . echoed in the "Kyrie Eleison."

THE CAPITANISSA'S FUNERAL

THE Capitanissa lay dead in her home by the ravine, in the parish of Haghia Kyriaké ; thus Zagora lost one of its oldest and most revered members of the community.

"Capetan Spirina" was her popular name because her husband had been a sea captain ; but her relatives and friends knew her as "Lenio," or cousin, as many of us chose to call her.

I can visualize now the drawing-room of the house where she lay, in her last sleep, uncovered in the coffin¹ and surrounded by weeping relatives and friends who watched by her until the priests should remove her from their sorrowing gaze.

The wonderful old face looked as though carved in marble. Her clasped hands held a tiny eikon, and sprigs of blue hydrangeas were strewn about the coffin, brought there by the women. She wore a sumptuous dress and turban with the old

¹ The coffin is always open ; according to a tradition this was so because under Turkish rule the Christians were suspected of concealing arms in the closed coffins. Hence the order that all coffins should be open.

silver-chased buckles of her belt, which the Capitanissa was wont to wear at a Panygiris or a wedding festival, so that she looked as of yore, an Archontissa, a venerable Dame of Zagora.

Amidst that crowd of wailing women, added to which came the sound of lamentations from her daughter, who sat near the coffin chanting a dirge, the dignity and calm of the Capitanissa held my attention ; I feel as if she scarcely belonged there any more, or cared, indeed, for their tears. . . .

The priests were reciting the prayers for the dead beginning with the "*Τρισάγιον*." ¹ They also incense the remains in between the prayers.

Downstairs the choir boys were waiting, with the cross, holy banners and Exapteryga,² which precede the funeral procession. The coffin, which is carried out feet foremost, is borne by men on poles, the corpse visible to all. The reader chants the words of the Psalm cxix., "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord."

¹ *Τρισάγιον* (Thrice Holy), a short hymn, so called from the word "Holy" ("Αγιος") being thrice repeated. The following hymns are said in succession : "The thrice Holy : Both now," "O most Holy Trinity," "Lord, have mercy" (thrice), the Lord's Prayer, and "Glory be to the Father," etc.

² Exapteryga, six-winged angels, signifying the Light of the Lord who is the Light of the world. And bearing the figure of the Lord and the words, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord Sabaoth," etc., etc.

It was a beautiful world she was leaving: 'The blue of the mountains encircled us, and the green shimmer of the forests which broke at the sea's marge seemed to make a fitting pageant even of death for this day.

So the coffin rested in the cool interior of the old church of Haghia Kyriaké, the face turned towards the east, and with great wax candles burning round it, and the beautiful service for the dead commenced by the deacon murmuring, "Bless, O Lord," to which the priest made answer, "Blessed is our Lord, now and for ever and ever. Amen."

The 119th Psalm is sung, the verses of the hymn "With the just spirits of the dead, include Thy servant, O Lord," and then the Beatitudes follow, and the Epistle and the Gospel with its glorious promise of immortality, held out to us. . . .

"Give repose to the soul of Thy servant in a blessed life." . . .

Finally comes that most touching moment of all when the priest has finished the prayers and calls upon those present to "take the last farewell" of the departed, saying three times, "Eternal is thy memory, blessed and of everlasting memory art thou, sister."

The relatives and friends press forward to impress a last kiss on the forehead of the dead.

Once more the funeral procession moves along, the paths of the village and descends into the cool

forest depths, where the Cemetery of S. John is situated. The words of the burial chant, "Give rest to the soul of the departed servant Lenio," and asking "for repose in a place of light, in a place of green pastures, in a place of rest, whence has fled all pain, sorrow and sighing," seem to find their echo in the peaceful stillness of the mountain side. . . .

"The Lord's is the earth and the fullness thereof, the universe and all those that dwell on it," are the parting words of the priest before the kind earth receives what is mortal of the Capitanissa.

For three days after the death, a *κανδύλα* is kept alight in the room of the deceased, as it is believed that the soul still hovers about the place of its last earthly habitation. Sometimes a plate with honey is also left near it.

After forty days, on the first Saturday or Sunday a memorial service is held for the repose of the soul of the dead. A dish of "kolyva" is prepared and laid in the middle of the table, with burning tapers either side of it.

Special importance is attached to this service of the "Forty Days"—*Tà Σαράντα*, as it is called.

The ceremony of the "Taking up of the remains" is performed after the expiration of three years.

In the early morning hour I saw a procession of women, the daughters of the deceased wending their way to the cemetery of Aghios Joannes.

One of them carried a bottle of wine. It would be needed to wash the bones with, they told me. The priest is there also. He is there to read a prayer over the remains, and if necessary to release the dead by his prayer if still under the curse of excommunication, or, indeed of any curse. For should, on opening the coffin, the body be found not in a state of disintegration, then the deceased must have indeed been under a curse.

The priest will proceed to read the prayer for the release from excommunication or a curse and the body will be reinterred.

Sadly and solemnly the women paid their last duty to their beloved dead. The bones were washed in wine and after being put into a wooden box was deposited in a small building in the cemetery grounds.

This strange rite is concluded, a sigh of relief from the women goes forth : " He had dissolved," they said, " God be praised." . . .

FASTING AND CONFESSION

FASTING as prescribed by the Greek Church is the very essence of self-denial and abstention from the pleasures of the table. It is the negation of bodily nourishment owing to the absence of anything nutritive in the foods permitted.

There are two great periods of fasting during the year, of forty days each, at Easter and Christmas, besides the lesser one preceding "the Koimesis" (Feast of the Assumption) of a fortnight, or the minor fasts like the fast of six days before the Feast of the Transfiguration on August 6, or the fast of one day before the beheading of John the Baptist on August 29.

The Great Lenten Fast commences on the Monday after the last Sunday in Carnival—known as "Cheese Sunday," because every one eats cheeses or dishes made exclusively of a milky substance—and is called *Καθαρὰ Δευτέρα*, or "Pure Monday," it being the first day of the Great Fast, and also because of the most rigorous form of fasting which is practised. No cooked food is eaten that day ;

but just olives, fresh salads, or fruit, cuttle fish and unleavened bread being consumed. "No oil or wine" is the command of the Church to be observed on this day, as on Wednesday of Passion Week, and other days as well, specially selected by the Greek Church for this form of fasting.

So with the advent of Lent there comes also the observance of the fast (*νηστεία*) which is one of the most important practices of the Eastern Church, on Wednesdays and Fridays ; or as in monasteries, and in fact, among strict orthodox, on all the forty days themselves, when no meat, or milk, eggs, or anything which has had animal life, is eaten.

This fasting is preparatory to receiving the Communion, which, according to the present custom of the Eastern Church, is taken three or four times a year only, and not as frequently as in the Roman and Anglican Churches.

These periods of fasting are regarded as a preparation to be followed by Confession, and as such are reserved for spiritual meditation and abstinence, in order to be worthy to partake of our divine Lord's Supper. It is also customary to take the Sacrament before marriage, in which case one fasts two days preceding the ceremony.

* * * * *

Confession is one of the Sacraments of the Church. No one can receive Holy Communion without

previously having made confession and received absolution from the priest.

In the side sanctuary, which is shut off from the central one—where stands the “*Ἅγιον Βῆμα*” (Holy Altar), and inside which no woman may enter—I see the priest standing beside the Protheris table, on which is a great eikon of the Redeemer.

He is not shut off by any Confessional screen ; he is there face to face with you, and wears his *ἐπιτραχήλιον* (stole) and holds his book of prayers in his hand.

He reads the opening words of the prayer for remission of sins which he asks you to repeat word for word after him.

“ Pray to Him to forgive thee thy sins,” says he, “ in all humility of heart before His sacred eikon, there.”

And in the solemn light of the sanctuary, the face of the Saviour with hand raised in blessing, calls for the act of obeisance and humility, which is required of the penitent, in the prayers for forgiveness of “ sins committed deliberately or otherwise,” to quote the beautiful and touching words of the Greek service. Then comes the question :

“ Is thy conscience burdened with any sin ? which, if confessed to Him who reads our hearts, and is the fountain of all mercy, will be remitted.”¹

¹ The Greek Church requires a two days' fast before the

One then makes a full confession. The priest asks finally : "Hast thou kept the fast ?" One answers, "Yes," or if not, gives a reason for not having done so.

Following upon the answer, through his mediation, the divine mercy will be invoked upon you, as, placing of the end of the *ἐπιτραχήλιον* (stole) on your bowed head, the priest recites the prayers of absolution and benediction.

His words of recommendation to the divine mercy for the "servant of God," that she may be forgiven all sins committed, whether deliberately or otherwise, fill the silence of the Sanctuary with their earnest pleading, and bring wonderful consolation to the hearer of them, for whose spiritual benefit they are being said.

It is indeed a "mystery" or sacramental act, this communion between the human and the divine through the penitent's admission of sinfulness which immediately brings the pardon sought, and received, through the efficacy of the prayers offered by the priest.

"By Thy infinite mercy and power," murmurs the priest, holding the crucifix up for me to kiss, with the final words of blessing in the name of the Holy Trinity.

So the second piece of preparation "in the trilogy," as I should like to call it, of the Church's reception of Holy Communion. But the strict observance of this fast may be relaxed for a valid reason, such as ill health, etc.

ceremonies is concluded, before the final act is reached in the partaking of the Holy Sacrament itself, for which the fasting and confession are but the spiritual preparation by every orthodox Christian.

HOLY WELLS (ΑΓΙΑΣΜΑΤΑ) AND ΚΟΙΜΗΣΙΣ

EMBEDDED in the southern slopes of the Acropolis rock at Athens there is a tiny cave containing a sacred spring; there is also a shrine to the Παναγία Σπηλαιότσσα (Virgin of the Grotto). In this cave the crystal drops appear to be distilled from the living rock, and are supposed to contain healing qualities. This belief is what brings the suppliants to its shrines on every day of the year, but more especially on the festival of the *Κοίμησις*, the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin on August 15.

This is only one of the Holy Wells which are all over Greece, where one sees the tiniest of chapels with their eikons and candlesticks, and which have their yearly festival also.

It is in a wonderfully romantic situation, this "spring" guarded by the two graceful Corinthian pillars of the Choragic monument to Thrasyllus and once a grotto of a pagan nymph. Scattered all over the lower slopes are the broken marbles of the Asclepion and the theatre of Dionysos, lying on their bed of asphodel and golden grasses.

Evening after evening have I seen the figures of the women climbing the steep path, carrying the oil with which to replenish the lamp burning before the eikon in the cave. For the light is never allowed to go out. The women tell me so when I ask them whither they go.

“The Virgin’s lamp may never be extinguished,” they say in answer to my question.

So the little twinkling red light is there to guide the footsteps of any one who would carry their prayer to the Mother of God enthroned high up on that once citadel of paganism.

On that August afternoon, the faithful make their pilgrimage to the cave. The priest leads the way, and following him are the people, the women carrying the “Προσφορά” and the oil for the vigil.

There will be Vespers said, it being the eve of the *Κοίμησις*; probably many of the worshippers will spend the whole night there, in prayer and supplication before the shrine; certainly they will if they desire a special favour from the Virgin.

The eikon of the Virgin is wreathed in flowers, and reverence is being paid to it by all who enter the cave. Mothers holding their children by the hand make deep reverence, sometimes the great *Μετάνοια*,¹ and lift the little ones to kiss the eikon.

¹ Great Metanoia, a reverence when you bow down with the forehead touching the ground.

They murmur prayers and cross themselves the whole time.

The priest recites the opening prayers of the *Εσπερινός*: "Blessed is our God, now, ever and ever, unto the ages of ages. Amen." Then follows the great canon of prayer to the Holy Mother of God. Full of exquisite poetry, these verses are one long glorification of the *Θεοτόκος*: "The Virgin Mother, the Bride of God, the protection, salvation and assistance of all believers; Mother of God, Queen of the Angels, refuge of Christians." . . .

The cave is full of the glory of the chanting and the devotion of the worshippers. The reader's voice is filled with a passionate exultation as he chants the "Troparion" of the day.

"O Mother of God, in thy childbirth thou didst retain thy virginity, in thy holy sleep thou didst not forget the world. Thou hast passed away into life, thyself being the Mother of life, and by thy prayers deliverest our souls from death."

"The grave and death could not retain the Mother of God."

The light from the candles and coloured lamps cast strange-shaped shadows on the rocky walls and ceiling of the chapel. Through the incense-laden atmosphere the eikon of the Virgin "falling asleep," and decked as it is with flowers, seems to be floating in the clouds of incense that surround it and bear it heavenwards.

EASTER IN ATHENS

PERHAPS Easter is the most interesting time of all to be in Athens, for it finds spring in full possession of the land. And there is no place that can so charm as Athens in spring-time, no such pageant of beauty elsewhere as here displayed on all sides for our delight. At this season particularly, when quaint and moving ceremonies are taking place in all the churches, when the strange customs and traditions that enter so largely into the life of the people appeal so powerfully to the imagination, one cannot help feeling very near the soul of the Greek race.

The Holy Orthodox Church has carefully preserved throughout the centuries almost all the traditions of the early Church, and was in fact thus enabled to preserve also the nationality of the people, and to rescue from total extinction the great heritage of the past throughout the long centuries of Turkish bondage.

Easter is the greatest festival of the Orthodox Church, not only because it typifies the resurrection of our Lord, but also because of its association with

the resurrection of spring, that season of joy and merrymaking which, in Greece especially, makes such an appeal to us all.

Palm Sunday is the first day of Holy Week, and at the morning service the church is decorated with bay and palm leaves, while over the floor are strewn evergreens, symbolical of the road along which our Lord passed amidst the acclamations of the Jews, "who, taking the leaves of the palms, hailed Him as the Comer in the name of the Lord"—a cry which was to be exchanged a few days later for the savage one of "Crucify! Crucify!" Again and again throughout the service occurs the joyful strain "Hosanna in the highest," and that most ancient of hymns, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth, full of Thy glory is the earth and heavens," symbols of the manifestation and fulfilment of the real glory of the Son of God in His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, of His Passion, and of His glorious Resurrection.

Sung by a full choir of men and boys, the heaving and restless Byzantine melody rises and falls like the sound of the sea, as it beats itself against the walls and fades away in a long-drawn sigh in the dome of the sanctuary as though spent with religious emotion. We are reminded again and again of the chorus of some classic drama, in the black-robed figures grouped together on the left of the altar—of some chorus in ancient lore chanting their sorrow-laden burden of song at appointed

intervals. And despite the lapse of centuries, there seems to be no such great distance after all between the celebration of the mysteries in honour of Demeter—those obscure workings of the Greek mind in search of immortality—and the Byzantine Church of to-day with its rituals and ceremonies, symbolism and deep religious sentiment.

In accordance with an Eastern custom, the next day begins after sunset, so we find the people gathering together at the evening service on Palm Sunday to follow the first scene of the divine drama about to be enacted. The joyous strains of the "Hosanna" no longer resound among the countless arches which, crossing each other like rainbows in the dome above, lose themselves among the evening shadows which are fast lengthening into the night of the Crucifixion. The cathedral is pervaded by an atmosphere of mysticism, dimly illuminated by the light of myriads of candles and of small coloured lamps, and the shadows tremble before the great rood-screen across the church.

The first act of the dramatic mystery of which Sunday evening is the precursor is the bearing forth from the sanctuary of the great eikon of our Lord, by a priest clad in sumptuous robes, accompanied by four other priests carrying censors of burning incense, the whole procession being preceded by the choir singing the hymn which is to be chanted on every evening of Passion Week, "Behold there comes the Heavenly Bridegroom in the middle of

the night, blessed be he, the servant, whom He finds watching for Him."

Outside the procession halts while the choir chants in the soft minor key: "Thy Passion to-day, O Christ, heralds a glorious day." The people, repeatedly crossing themselves, press forward reverently to kiss the eikon. On Monday and Tuesday there is the same evening service, while on Wednesday at three o'clock there is the preparatory service for the Holy Communion, it is called "Euchelaion" or the anointing, and on that day, as also on Good Friday, the most rigid form of fasting is practised, not even oil being taken, the only meals consisting of boiled vegetables, olives or fruit. Such rigorous fasting is characteristic of the abstinence of the Greek people—cheerfully endured by those who adhere to it. On Thursday morning is celebrated the "Mysticos Deipnus,"¹ in remembrance of our Lord's first Eucharist when by breaking bread and blessing wine He initiated His wondering and sorrowful disciples into the Mystery of the Sacrament, henceforth to become a divine symbol of His sacrifice.

On appearing at the central door of the sanctuary the priest holds aloft the sacred cup containing the Blessed Sacrament and pronounces in a loud voice, "Take, eat, this is My Body." As the people approach, the beautiful 23rd Psalm is intoned by the reader to the left, to be followed by the chant, "Thy mystic supper to-day, O Lord, I partake of,"

¹ Mystical Supper

and repeated by the choir again and again.

At the evening service three chapters are read from each of the twelve gospels, with the account of the Lord's Supper, Betrayal, and Crucifixion. After the reading of the fifth gospel, the priest, wearing his robes of black and silver and bearing the great black cross, upon which is painted the image of the Saviour, emerges from a side door of the rood-screen, preceded by the choir, and assisted by other priests and deacons. He intones as he moves along the words of the hymn, "To-day there hangs on the cross," the congregation kneels, lighted tapers in hand, as the procession slowly passes along towards the centre of the church, where the cross is set up and left.

The whole effect of the scene is both vivid and impressive: the harsh sound of the hammer driving in the nails conveys a startling reality to the sorrowful and awestruck people. It seems indeed as if the dread hour of the Crucifixion was no mere symbolical representation. Thus passionately indeed are they attached to the faith of their forefathers.

On Good Friday they visit the churches to reverence the Epitaphios (a silk picture of the dead Christ), deposited on a bier in the centre of the church and covered with sweet-smelling flowers. The ceremony of taking down from the cross is over, the people kneel in worship, and take a flower away with them. The church bells ring out

in melancholy cadences, others in turn take up the refrain, and the tolling continues throughout the day. Mingling with them come the plaintive notes of the bleating lambs which pass in flocks through the streets on their way to the market-place, a strange unison of sounds indeed.

Still more fascinating is the sight of the moving lights of the candles and torches of the evening procession, from the tiny church built on the site where Enneacrounos stood, some twenty centuries before. It winds along the banks of the Ilissus in Agrae, and illuminates with an unearthly glow the stately group of columns of the Olympeion. One feels oneself living in a past which is yet part of the present. At every turn one meets such processions as these, preceded by their sacred banners and choirs, the spring night resounding with the music and chanting which accompany the burial of Christ. The inhabitants hurry homewards in their thousands, tapers in hand, until at last silence falls upon the city.

It is Saturday, and one knows that the atmosphere of sorrow and mourning has passed, for a feeling of joyous anticipation fills the air. Wooden booths at all the street corners are laden with piles of red eggs and candles, and festooned with coloured paper. The Paschal Lamb has been slain and preparations for to-morrow's feasting move apace.

At 11 p.m. the bells are calling the faithful to the churches. The hand of the clock approaches

midnight, and the priest has discarded his sombre robes for coloured garments. Holding a lighted taper he offers it to the congregation, with the words, "Arise, and take the flame from the Eternal Light, and praise Christ Who is risen from the dead," who at once light their own candles from his. Soon the church is a twinkling mass of light. The glad strains of the hymn, "Christ is risen from the dead," burst forth triumphantly from the choir and pass in a murmur throughout the whole assembly. Bells ring out wildly, while the dull thud of the cannon and the sharp rifle reports make a clashing pandemonium for a few minutes. On every lip henceforth, throughout Easter week will be heard from friend and stranger alike the greeting, "Christos Aneste!" (Christ is risen!).

On re-entering the church—the Resurrection service is always held outside in the courtyard—the Liturgy of S. John Chrysostom begins, everyone holding their lighted tapers, which, at the conclusion of the service they carry home with them, endeavouring to keep the wind from extinguishing them, in order to light the *κανδύλα* before the eikonostasion.

On Easter afternoon a service called the "Agape" is held at two o'clock, at which the gospel is read in twelve languages.

And so Easter is ushered in. Through an open door one looks into a courtyard. A group of people are seated before the glowing embers of a slow fire,

a lamb is being roasted on the spit, turned round and round in slow rhythmical manner by two men, a cask of wine and red eggs are hard by,¹ a party of minstrels are playing a soft dance tune, in preparation for the festivities which are to follow. For dancing is a great feature of these Easter merry-makings. Especially the dancing which takes place at Megara, a village not far from Athens, is expressive of the joy which is abroad. Imagine a day of brilliant sunshine, a dazzling blue sky against which the white and coloured houses of the village stand out in sharp relief, a strip of sapphire sea beyond. It is midday, the peasants gather for the dance, the musicians draw nearer and nearer, the sharp staccato notes of the pipes break out, mingling with the deep muffled thud of the drum. Soon the moving mass of colour resolves itself into circles of swaying men and women, even the little children join hands and imitate their elders in a series of grotesque shuffling steps as they move backwards and forwards. A white-bearded old peasant leads a ring of men in a truly Bacchanalian step, for the wild music of the pipes has urged him on, so that one could almost imagine him to be a reincarnation of the great god Pan himself, sharing in one of his own revelries.

¹ Red eggs only are distributed to the congregation of the communities abroad, and when the Resurrection service is held on Easter Sunday morning, like in the Greek Churches of London, Liverpool, and Manchester.

“ Christos Aneste ! ” is the cry everywhere heard in this joyful land of sunshine and of spring. And is it not indeed the very resurrection of spring, with its promise of renewed life, which these people are celebrating in their own beautiful land as the greatest of Christian festivals ?

A PRIEST'S FAMILY

PRIESTS and deacons of the Greek Church are allowed to marry ; indeed, parish priests are required to do so, though only once ; but then they can never attain a higher rank in the Church's hierarchy.

Bishops, archimandrites and abbots are drawn from the monastic orders, and celibacy is required of them.

All priests are appointed by the bishop of the diocese. As often as not the sons of priests wanting to follow in their father's footsteps, are appointed to the same parish.

There is much to be said in praise of these simple parish priests of the rural districts, whose lowly and meritorious lives are often of a truly apostolic character.

Such a one, indeed, was Pappa Panayiotis, of Pori, near Zagora. This worthy priest would oftentimes walk from the neighbouring village of Pori—a good two hours' journey to Zagora—in order to see us, and break his fast with us, bringing his

basket laden with green figs and purple grapes which he himself had gathered in early dawn from his orchard, and still glistening with dewdrops.

Is it not delightful to think of him, and of so many others, as a gardener also, who tills his own garden and prunes his own vines, in between the saying of his offices ?

Drawing no regular salary, but depending entirely on the fees paid for christenings, weddings, funerals and other occasions to support his family, this priest, despite his poverty and life of toil, appeared to be one of the happiest men possible. He declared that his real and abiding faith in God's mercy made him so, because, and as he so often used to tell me, "He will provide for and watch over us all."

One felt the sincerity of the words of grace which he said before the meals. How gracious in its apostolic simplicity, carrying with it the earliest traditions, was this coming amongst us of the "Man of God" after his toilsome journey : this partaking of our hospitality, as did those Apostles of old who used the same prayers and in the self-same language blessed the repast and the inmates of the house, with the recitation of the "Lord's Prayer," the "Kyrie Eleison," and "Christ our God, bless this meat and drink of Thy servants, for holy art Thou, always, now and ever and ever, unto the ages of ages. Amen."

"Blessed be God, Who mercifully feeds us with

His good gifts, through His goodness and loving-kindness, always, now and ever" . . . on the conclusion of the meal.

Yes, he was content to live by his work in the vineyard of the Lord, without a murmur of complaint at the barrenness thereof. Rejoicing in a homely paternal manner, in domestic bliss, so characteristic of the Greek people, and one of their great virtues. He was a typical Greek father in his love of family life.

One specially noticed this as he sat among his wife and children, holding on his knee the youngest of all, a baby girl whom he adored. I witnessed this aspect of his life on the day we went over to Pori from Zagora, at daybreak on a glorious July day.

Shall I ever forget that ride through the dim forest glades, long before the sun's rays had penetrated into their green depths? When the trunks of the trees lay wrapped in roseate and silver shadows and only the faint twittering of the birds broke the sylvan quietude. . . . How the great waterfall at the Kalocairino foamed over the huge boulders, and shallow pools of the ravine, and drowned our voices, as we crossed the shaky wooden bridge which spanned it.

And all the mingled scents of the earth and atmosphere vied with each other in their cloying sweetness. Their fragrance steals back upon my memory even to this day, with a pang something akin to real "nostalgie."

On our arrival at the village and dismounting at the threshold of the church where the priest awaits us, we enter its still shadowy precincts, one of our men bearing the *Προσφορά*,¹ the oil and wine for the *Λειτουργία* (Liturgy).

This is a special service Pappa Panayiotis has long promised to hold for us in his own parish church. He considers it to be a species of thanksgiving for all the kindness of which he has been the recipient from us. Through the efficacy of the divine sacrifice he hopes to obtain the welfare of those for whom he offers his supplications.

For in the service of the *Λειτουργία* (Liturgy) the bread for use in the Holy Communion bears a circular impression containing, besides the centre square, called the *Άμνός* (Lamb), a second one for the Virgin, and nine triangles symbolical of the nine orders of saints; then, whilst severing the nine triangles of bread, he invokes the mediation of the saints they represent on our behalf, i.e. we the worshippers present, naming us each in turn.

“Blessed is the kingdom of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost” are the opening words of the *Λειτουργία* (Liturgy). And whilst listening to the familiar prayers and chants of the service, the tall ascetic figure of the priest appears through the dim clouds of incense like one of the ancient eikons come to life. He stands with hands raised in a

¹ *Προσφορά*, loaf of oblation.

devotional attitude against the dull, gold background of the iconastasis (rood-screen).

The words of the final blessing are pronounced : " Christ, our true Lord," and through the prayers of our holy fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ, God have mercy upon us, and save us. Amen." Then follows the distribution of the blessed bread, and we regain the sunshine outside and ride away to the spot high up among the chestnut trees, where we all forgather to partake of the repast the priest and his family have prepared for us.

The glory of the day is around us. Almost involuntarily I am haunted by the words of the concluding psalm, which gladden my inner vision as an epitome of to-day's beautiful service : " I will bless the Lord at all times ; His praise shall continually be in my mouth."

(over and over?)

EUCHELAION

THE *Εὐχέλαιον* is one of the Church's seven Sacraments, and is administered to those whether "sick in body or soul," either for the remission of their sins as on Wednesday of Holy Week before taking of Holy Communion, or if suffering from any form of bodily sickness, in which case the priest carries the "Euchelaion" to the sick person.

The church bells ring, and the priest, wearing his stole and bearing the "Euchelaion," comes out of the side door, accompanied by a man swinging a censer. He is on his way to the house of one of his parish sick, who lies in need of his ministrations. On entering the house he first makes a deep reverence in front of the eikonostasion, then approaches the bedside of the sick man. Then, while anointing the forehead, cheeks, lips, breast, and palms of the hands of the sick, says the following prayer :

"Holy Father, Doctor of souls and bodies, who sendest Thy only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to cure every sickness and to redeem us from death,

cure this Thy servant (or handmaid), from the evil which is in him, be it of the body or the soul, and vivify (give life) him (or her) by the grace of Your Christ.

The consecration of the oil at the “Euchelaion” is prepared by seven priests; seven prayers are read, seven epistles as well as seven gospels are recited over it. In the absence, however, of the regular number of priests being there, one priest can consecrate the oil for the “*Εὐχέλαιον*.”

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